

Some Problems of South Korean Government's Current Integrating Policies Regarding North Korean Defectors and Its Future Options

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Introduction

What might have prompted the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to make an unexpected pledge, in his New Year's Day speech of 2013, to "improve the nation's economy" and "call for better relations with South Korea"? (Evans JR Revere, 2013, 10 *Asia Times*) One can only wonder, this speech coming shortly after the infamous launching of a long-range rocket just a month earlier in December 2012, in the face of world-wide opposition and condemnation. The rest is, of course, history – namely, that launch failed and brought about ever tighter U.N. sanctions. Then, again, truer to his and North Korean Regime's character, openly defiant and unrepentant; the North Koreans carried out their 3rd Nuclear Test on February 22, 2013, surpassing international nuclear weapons experts' estimation of its explosive power by more than the factors of ten or so, its actual explosive power having been scientifically observed to be nearly ten times more than that of the Hiroshima A-bomb of 1945.

In the South, the newly elected conservative President Park Geun-hye who barely had the time to form a government announced in her public response to Northern provocations that her government would place national security ahead of any other policy agenda, reminding South Korean people that ROK and DPRK were still technically *at war*, which was never actually put to an end with any sort of peace-treaty but only a (temporary) truce, which actually means in strict sense of the term '*a pause during an act of war*', so to speak. As a matter of fact, the war had never ended, the act of war having been carried out in many other disguised or explicit brute ways, if not in full scale, continually ever since the truce. Surely, the sinking of South Korean naval ship, Chonanham, off the shores of Baekryongdo and the bombing of Yeonpyeong-do Island, barely hundred miles from the city of Seoul are only the latest proof of the ongoing war.

Under the circumstances, it can hardly be expected DPRK will in any foreseeable future embark on an economic reform, as it cannot be their primary political agenda, as war-preparedness surpasses any other concerns of North Korea and its regime. In this regard, President Park's public responses must be understood in that same context, too. In other words, she was abruptly reminded by the recent series of North's belligerent provocations of the primacy of National Security over any other nation's concerns and political agenda. This is an unfortunate but real fact of the matter that prevails over Korean peninsula at present. Hence, no one can possibly expect any sort of breakthrough between ROK and DPRK for at least a peaceful *détente*, disclaiming any mutual hostilities and belligerent acts against one another, not to mention a full-scale peaceful reunification.

Against the backdrop of this renewed cold war antagonism at its highest pitch, both the North and South tossing war-threats at each other at the highest military echelons, I propose to review the current SK's government policies regarding NK defectors to the South to whose settlement in the country no priority has so far been given or presently being given. The NK

defectors are a kind of stateless people drifting all around the world, in the countryside of vast continent of China or the Far-Eastern Siberia of Russia, and even on the region immediately to the north of the DMZ in the middle of which is located Panmunjom; wherever they are, they are non-citizens, mere drifters, soul-less, with no identity of any kind. This lack of identity makes it difficult for them to permanently settle down as a full member of a society, a body politic, even when they succeed to come into South Korea.

Something like this terribly un-viable state of mind in which a preponderant majority of North Korean defectors found themselves is perhaps the most compelling reason, among others, that not a few NK defectors have decided to make their way back to DPRK after a few years of futile effort to integrate them into the society of the South. Upon their return to North, they told on Joong-Ang TV, the NK National Broadcasting System, that they had been enticed by false SK propaganda and that their life in the South had not been a happy one. Some others found a way to settle in a third country, other than both Korea, such as USA or UK or elsewhere for a better life, while still others took even more drastic way of repudiating both of the two Koreas by committing suicide or by becoming vengeful criminals in the underworld, practically giving up on themselves in desperation.

Then we take it that NK defectors by and large felt that what waited for them in SK was not worth all the great risks they had to take to flee NK in order to live in the South with the same Korean historical, cultural and spiritual as well as racial legacies. (Ironically, in contradistinction, among the ranks of the well-settled NK defectors, working for posh jobs at places like the City Hall of Seoul or Corporate Agencies, NK secret agents were discovered to actually have been espionage agents purposefully infiltrated into SK disguised as defectors.) Whether the NK defectors were justified in feeling poorly received in SK or not, their actions were based on their perception (feeling) of reality they found in SK. Therefore, it is critically important to ask the following troubling questions:

What is the problem with the present integration policies of South Korea? What has gone wrong with them? Have SK government and SK people as individuals done the right things and enough for them to settle down amongst themselves and help them to try harder to integrate themselves into SK society as full SK citizens? Indeed, this is the question I propose to raise and to offer tentative answers to it as well as to suggest a few government policy options in dealing with NK defectors, whose number is bound to increase sharply in the coming years and decades. Accordingly, in the remainder of this paper, we shall first look into the evolutionary process of the socio-political phenomenon of North Korean defectors vis-à-vis the South Korean government's NK Defector policies of the past and present and then make a value-ridden radical suggestion from my own alternative theoretical vantage point (different from the failed SK government policy makers') in order to suggest some corrective policy measures to remedy the shortcomings of those policies which resulted in failure in large part.

I. The increasing number of NK defectors in S. Korea

1. Dramatic increase of NK defectors after 1994

The number of NK defectors between 1949 and May 1995 was only 639 and they fled to the South in defiance of the NK government from their political oppression, impoverishment and human rights violations. As such, they were political refugees in strict accordance with the very definition of 'political refugee' given by United Nations High Commission on Refugees. Until the year 1990 there were less than 10 NK defectors a year coming into SK and they

were mostly defections for political reasons. But the number started to increase dramatically ever since 1994 soon after the sudden death of Kim Il-sung, the NK found and leader, when the great famine of NK put most ordinary citizens to the very precarious states of malnutrition and mass starvation, which actually happened subsequently to the millions. The initial number of defectors from North was 52 in 1994, then 40 in 1995, 51 in 1996, 41 in 1997, 100 in 1999, and 1, 000 in 2002 respectively (Do 1998; Shin 2010).

The ratio of the increase in defection almost doubled from 2006 and more than 2,000 defectors came to the South each year until 2012 when it showed a sudden drop to 1,509. It seems to have resulted mainly from the NK's more thorough border control management which had been put in force by the new NK regime of Kim Jong-un. But the Chinese Public Security Bureau also helped by tightening up their side of the border. Last, but not the least, there's one more significant factor to consider in that suddenly dropping number of NK defectors: it is Lee Myung-bak's SK Government policies toward NK, an uncompromisingly hard-line policy, a sudden abrupt 180 degree turn from his predecessors' Sunshine policies which was in force for at least ten continuing years.

Table 1 <Number of NK Defectors, 1998~2012>

	~98	~01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	Total
Male	831	585	511	472	624	423	512	571	608	671	589	797	402	7,578
Female	118	479	632	810	1,272	959	1,510	1,977	2,196	2,258	1,81	1,909	1,107	17,038
Total	947	1,044	1,143	1,282	1,896	1,382	2,022	2,548	2,804	2,929	2,402	2,706	1,509	24,614
F/all (%)	12	46	55	63	67	69	75	78	78	77	75	70	72	69

Source: Ministry of Unification, SK

<http://www.unikorea.go.kr/CmsWeb/viewPage.req?idx=PG00000000365>

It appears that during the last 2 decades, there was a sharper increase in the defection for economic reasons than for political reasons; an increasing number of people crossed NK borders in family units to flee from the acute food shortages in NK, exacerbated by the continuous drought and flood for several years' running and the resulting reduction of daily food ration,¹ not nearly enough to prevent mass starvation as it had actually happened to the millions of NK people.

In October 10, 2012 *The Daily NK* cited Voice of America (VOA) in its report that "one in three North Korean residents is in a state of malnutrition." The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP) report on "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012" revealed that some 8 million or 32% of NK residents between

¹ According to *Yonhap News*, the gross total of grain production in 1993 amounted to 913 tons but it suddenly dropped to 259 tons in 1994 due to natural disasters and showed no radical recovery since. Consequently, the daily ration was frighteningly cut down to 350g per person in 1994. It used to be 700g per person, was cut down by 12 % in 1973 and again by 10% in the 1980s. In June 2012 it was just slightly raised to 380g, some 63% of the World Food Program's minimum daily recommendation of 600g a day.

2010 and 2012 on average were undernourished. Moreover the people in NK suffered “the greatest famine since the Ethiopia in 1984” in the late 1990s and NK “has lost more than 10 percent of its population to starvation alone” (Kim 2010, 45). Therefore it is in fact “severe food shortage” that “is probably the most common reason why North Koreans defect” (Kim 2010, 62). Hence the Table 2 which presents the motives of defection to South Korea given by the NK defectors between 2010~2012 largely correspond to such a fact. Some 40% of the NK defectors come to SK between 2010 and 2012 said that they defected to SK for economic reasons whereas only 12.5% said in direct reply that they fled because they were not satisfied with the NK regime or for political repression.

Table 2 <Motives given by NK defectors, 2010~2012>

Motive	Year			
	2010	2011	2012	2010-2012
Economic Reason	23	77	64	164 (39.1%)
Regime Dissatisfaction	6	21	26	53 (12.6%)
Asked by Defected Family Member(s)	6	46	56	108 (25.7%)
Fear for Punishment	0	6	8	14 (3.3%)
Evasion of Punishment	2	5	6	13 (3.1%)
Other Reasons	10	32	26	68 (16.2%)
Non-responses	104	43	39	186 (-)
Total Cases	151	230	225	606 (100%)

Source: EAI Security Initiative Working Paper 29, p. 4.

As we can see from Table 1 above, the number of defectors increased most dramatically during the period of 2006-2011 under both Roh Mu-hyun and Lee Myung-bak governments. The foremost reason for this is of course the deteriorating economic condition in general and the food shortage in particular. There also has been a conjecture about the deferred effects of a new mood of détente, engineered by Kim Dae-jung Government's Sunshine policy measures towards NK; the political mood of détente had never been seen before in a divided Korean peninsula at least since the outbreak of Korean War in 1950. In carrying out his version of 'Sunshine Policy,' the then President of SK, Kim Dae-jung went to Pyongyang in person for a summit meeting with Kim Jong-il, the first such meeting ever between the heads of two Koreas on June 15, 2000, ushering in an era of détente for the very first time in half a century.

There were two striking features to this policy: one is the massive material aid as well as personal exchanges most of which were in favor of the NK and the other is the amiable mood for communications between the two Korean regimes for the first time since the truce of 1953. What is not to be neglected for our discussion here is the secondary effect of the Sunshine Policy. In fact, the crux of it was the infiltration of material, people, as well as information of SK into the northern part of the peninsula even though the amount and scope of them were not sufficient enough to have an overarching effect for any immediate changes in that

territory. Nevertheless rumors about the affluent South were being spread out primarily among the high echelons and then gradually trickling down to the ranks of ordinary people as well perhaps through eavesdrops or some such other means.

Then, too, North Korean TV also covered, albeit in strictly limited coverage, some aspects of South Korean reality during the short period of just before the June 15 Summit Meeting and just afterwards—for example, a little glimpse of how SK people actually lived, how SK cities are full of life and dynamism, and what SK society actually was like and so on. NK people could see that what they were told about SK until then did not match with what they could see in those little bits of TV reports on SK with their own eyes. (The meeting of the two heads of Korea was such a historical event that Kim Dae-jung's coming to Pyongyang in person could not be kept in secret to the NK public.)

Still later on, because of the agreements by the two heads to hold “Arirang Festival” in Pyongyang, the Mt. Gungangsan sight-seeing tours for SK people and what later turned out to be the most significant one, the Red-Cross mediated relative reunions during the 10 years of a relatively amicable relationship between North and South Korea during the ten years of Kim Dae-jung and then Noh Mu-hyun Presidency. NK people thus had further chances to observe with their own eyes how SK people lived, from their appearances when SK people came to visit these agreed events in NK in fairly large numbers for the first time in half a century or more – e.g., their level of nourishment, quality of clothes they wore, their very body postures and movements, as the telling signs of their daily lives not so rigidly controlled as in their cases in NK. These ‘Sunshine’ years might have got them an idea that the South governments and its people are friends to whom they could turn in dire times.

It was in some such a historical context of ten-year-long relatively amicable mood of détente which prevailed over the Korean peninsula that the NK defectors began to think of SK as a viable destination point for their eventual settlement for the first time. Now they began to think that SK would offer them the best chances for once again to belong to a national community among fellow Koreans, speaking the same language and the same cultural heritages. So, a majority of NK defectors eking out precarious living in far-flung areas of China began to make active moves, gathering information on travel routes to SK, possible international political or charitable agencies' helps, and so on; they naturally wanted to rid of their precarious existence, constantly fearful of a capture at any moment by the Chinese Security authorities and forcibly returned to NK for a certain torture and eventual summary execution at the hands of the notorious NK secret police.² (Their fear of summary deportation to NK was real, a mutual agreement having been signed by NK and China in 1960 and then again in 1986, giving China the mandate to repatriate NK defectors found in its territory back to NK.³)

But even after making what must be a very difficult decision to leave their home in NK, however brutal their lives might have been therein; it would prove to be even harder to actually reach their final destination, SK. Many of them had to have helping hands, for those lucky ones, in the persons of Christian missionaries mostly from SK, humanitarian NGO activists and even some well-meaning businessmen-do-gooders in China, lending necessary

² At present the estimated number of North Korean defectors residing in China is from minimum 20,000 to maximum 300,000, depending on different sources (Kang 2005, 35). In 2006, UNHCR's High Commissioner Antonio Guterres affirmed this figure but “no one really knows the true size of the North Korean refugee population” in China (Kim 2010, 73-74).

³ China in 1969 secretly concluded an agreement with North Korea ‘China-North Korea Mutual Extradition of Criminals’ (namely ‘The Agreement for Repatriation of Illegal Entries’) which was followed by ‘Agreement on Border Business Management’ in 1986. Moreover they strengthened repatriation by signing the ‘Memorandum for Jilin Province Border Management’ in November 1993 (Sohn 1999, 174).

assistancess. These people are sometimes called ‘brokers’⁴ who mostly have ROK passports and the means to take care, protect and guide the NK defectors in China until they eventually arrive in South Korea. They are the master-minds of the entire process of ‘organized defections’ to South Korea. This type of ‘defection brokerage’ first made their appearance during Kim Dae-jung era of northward Sunshine Policy.

There’re actually two different types of ‘defection brokerage’: one is a passage to some foreign mission corps such as an UNHCR office, embassies or consulates or foreign school, and the other is a passage to Seoul via third countries. The latter type of ‘defection-brokerage’ is the one most commonly used, for no other reason than that the first method is becoming less and less available, as the Chinese Public Security Forces began to guard the foreign diplomatic missions and other similar international religious or humanitarian organizations from which NK defectors might want to find international or/and legal protection as legitimate refugees sanctioned by UN High Commission on Refugees.

2. NK defectors, are they economic refugees or political defectors?

According to the UN ‘Convention relating to the Status of Refugees’ signed on July 28, 1951 and ‘Text of the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees’ “a refugee is someone” who “is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” And the Convention is based on such three fundamental principles as “non-discrimination, non-penalization and *non-refoulement*.”

In light of this definition, the NK defectors should be treated as international refugees for they have “a well-founded fear of being persecuted” upon being forcibly returned to NK, where a repatriated person is either put to death as an anti-government element or sent to political laboring camp according to the Article 47 of North Korean Criminal Law. In this regard, China and Russia, which have borders with North Korea and thus were the two most likely destination points for NK defectors since mid-1980s when the defection began in meaningful numbers for the first time. In close examination, the two countries, China in particular, appear to have defied the international refugee conventions and repatriated NK defectors even though both China in 1982 and Russia in 1993 signed for the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Protocol of 1967 whose *non-refoulement* principle must not be violated by its signatories.

However, when the loggers in Siberia ran away from their workplace seeking for better lives, Russia made their human rights an issue to be observed by DPRK and renegotiated the Forestry Labor Agreement with them in March 1993.⁵ By contrast China took a reversed

⁴ There are two types of brokers: one is good ones in the sense that they act out of humanitarian or religious concerns and the other is bad ones working for financial gains from the defectors who promise to pay for their service when they arrive in Seoul and receive the resettlement money from the SK government. Its rate is usually between 4 and 10 million Won or 3,500 and 8,000 US\$, per person. The Ministry of Unification revealed that 83% of the total 1,866 people come to South Korea in 2004 was helped by such brokers (*Yonhap News*, December 23, 2004).

⁵ The number of NK loggers in Russia was known to be about 10,000 in 2006. Song Ki Bok, a 48-year old former logger who now lives in South Korea told The Daily NK on November 18th, 2010, “The Forestry Mission takes 70% of monthly salary in the name of Party funding. Who would want to work there when all the money you earn from working yourself to death is taken from you?” (*The Daily NK*).

route to stricter border security checks, more frequent crackdowns on the NK defectors within and to rewriting a more rigid memorandum with DPRK concerning border inspections near the NK-China borders of the three Northeastern Provinces.⁶ China in a broader context adopted the ‘PRC Immigration Management Law’ on June 30, 2012, which may as well affect the NK defectors in China, indirectly and yet profoundly. For “this means that North Korean defectors themselves, defection brokers and friends who help in the process could all run afoul of the new law.”⁷

From a slightly different perspective, the UNHCR in 1994 after the end of Cold War newly included the internally displaced persons or the IDPs in the category of refugees. The IDPs are defined as those people who firstly “were forced to flee their homes because their lives were at danger,” secondly “remain exposed to violence and other human rights violations during their displacement,” thirdly “have no or only very limited access to food, employment, education and health care,” but finally “unlike refugees they did not cross international borders.” Taking the first three defining elements of IDPs into account the NK defectors currently spread worldwide⁸ may fit well in the category of IDPs. In regard to the

<http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01300&num=7034>

⁶ The Japanese *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported, “The Chinese government even after the death of Kim Jong -il in December of last year [2011] has repatriated roughly 30 defectors to North Korea every day.”

<http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk00100&num=9141> (Search on February 27, 2013).

⁷ <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk00100&num=9449> (Search on February 27, 2013).

⁸ Numbers of NK defectors in Other Countries, 2001-2011

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Country											
UK				17	33	64	281	570	574	581	603
Germany		225	258	276	193	239	204	180	156	146	193
Netherlands	7	9	14	15	18	20	27	29	31	32	36
Australia	4	4	3	3	6	8	15	14	15	25	29
USA			7	9	9	30	22	23	25	25	25
Canada			3	4	4	4	4	4	4	23	64
Belgium							7	9	13	22	31
Norway	3	3	3	3	4	5	9	13	14	14	14
Russia						0		6	10	14	18
Denmark	2	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	9	9	14
Sweden		2	2	2	6	7	7	7	8	8	9
Ireland	1	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	5
Switzerland	1	2	1	1	1	6	6	6	4	4	4
Kirgizstan						2	5	6	7	3	2
Israel							2	2	2	2	1
Mexico					1	1	1	1	1	1	1
New Zealand	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
Spain											1
Poland											1
Yemen								1	1	1	1
Uzbekistan		1									
Total Cases	19	259	304	343	288	398	605	886	881	917	1,053

Source: UNHCR Online Population Database; Recited from JPI Policy Forum No. 2012-15, p. 12.

final element of not crossing international borders the NK defectors cannot be classified as the IDPs at all.

Thus, the NK defectors have not been treated properly by any government in question as refugees even though they in fact are and could not be taken for internally displaced people as they are outside their country. On the other hand, however, the NK defectors in SK can surely qualify for the fourth element of the IDPs because the SK's legal or constitutional definition of a Korean denotes whoever belongs to the two Koreas as the Article 3 of the 'Constitution' of ROK states that "The territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean peninsula and its adjacent islands." In its extension, the ROK's legal definition appears in the Article 3 of the present 'Law on Protection of and Assistance to Settlement Concerning North Korean Defectors' that a NK defector is someone who "has abode, family members in a direct line, spouse, occupation in the northern region above the military demarcation line (hereafter 'North Korea') and has not acquired a foreign nationality after having left the northern region." With this definition at hand we may very well take NK defectors for a 'minority' group whose origin makes them distinct in the SK society but it like any other minority groups has civil rights as well as human rights to demand other members' respect for it (Park 2002, 216; Ryoo 2005).

This viewpoint above all constitutes a basis for SK to offer the IDP status to the NK defectors within its territory and therefore to provide them with humanitarian aids such as food, shelter, education, medical care, social welfare services, as well as jobs. In addition to this, there is one other reason for SK to take up all those burdens without any hesitation at all. As far as SK is concerned the NK defectors are the potential contributors to and useful vehicles for the reunification of the divided two Koreas, who will be able to help fill the huge gulf, cultural and psychological, between the north and south societies fallen wide apart for more than 60 years since the Korean War.

In sum, there are two important premises upon which SK sets out to make policies for the NK defectors. One is that the NK defectors are SK's internally displaced people who are entitled to humanitarian provisions. To put it in a nationalist language, they are the lost half of a body politic and therefore it is only natural that the South Koreans care for the North Koreans and want to make with them a body politic as a whole. The other premise is that they are the ones whose mediating role to link the two Korean societies as well as their people before and after the possible and undoubted reunification of the Korean peninsula is essential and therefore worth reckoning with in designing the nation's reunification policy packages. For this reason these two premises have not been altered regardless of their forms and substances that have undergone considerable changes up to now. With these in mind, let us now trace the history of South Korean policies towards NK defectors as they evolved over the years, often making false starts, in their efforts to help settle them in SK society as full-fledged citizens.

II. Major Features of ROK's NK Defector Policies

1. Legal system changes and its principles

There was no specific legal basis to protect and lend assistance to NK defectors until 1962 when the 'Law on the Special Assistance to the Men of National Merit and Defected Men from North Korea' was introduced for the first time. Before this law the matters concerning NK defectors who were very few at that time was exclusively dealt with by the military

security institutions. This first law stipulated the NK defectors to be equivalent to those who have done admirable contributions for the country and its people and to their survived families. According to this 1962 law, the NK defectors were entitled to generous resettlement money, job, education, and other welfare benefits.

In 1974 the wording of this legal title was changed to 'Law on the Special Assistance to the Men of National Merit and Others' without much change made into its contents. Again it was changed to 'Law on the Special Compensation for the Defected Heroes from North Korea' in December 1978. With the focus on the NK defectors alone, a special consideration was given to the fact that NK defectors had taken great risks of losing their lives en route to SK. As a result, the status of NK defectors was elevated to that of national heroes in this new law and the word 'compensation' replaced 'assistance' in its previous version.

In June 1993 the law was once again changed to 'Law on Protection of Defected Compatriots from North Korea.' In this time the legal emphasis was shifted to the minimum settlement money with skill acquisition as the law adopted a new rationalized definition of the NK defectors as defected Korean nationals entitled to SK government's protection and support, who had been identified as national heroes under the previous law. Accordingly they no longer was given free residences without first making them go through a set of rigorous personal examinations in order to assess their potentiality for future contribution to South Korean society and also taking into consideration their age, number of household, etc.

Finally, then, it was the fall of Berlin Wall in 1990 and the subsequent crumbling of the East European Communist Bloc countries that made South Korea reevaluate its existing policies towards NK defectors. Until then, SK Government was just using NK defectors as a mere pawn in a cynical propaganda-war game just as NK was doing with real or alleged SK defectors to their side; a defection to one side would be publicized as the proof of the sheer superiority of their political system of state socialism or liberal democracy. However, after the sudden collapse, the world-wide consensus was that the contest between two conflicting political ideologies came to an end with the victory of liberal democracy over state socialism. SK too accepted that consensus of the decisive victory of its own political system (over that of NK) and hence felt that there was no more to prove to the side of NK. Some such thinking went into a fairly radical policy changes towards NK defectors on the part of the SK Government leadership; henceforth, NK defectors were bona-fide Refugees deserving humanitarian aids in finding a new life for them in a SK rather than as prize catches with propaganda values.

In addition, this policy shift was a necessary measure to cope with the sheer increase of NK defectors coming into the country. As mentioned earlier, until 1993 there were only 10 or less NK defectors in a year, but this annual in-bound number increased dramatically after Kim Il-sung's sudden death in 1994 and thereafter. There were two interrelated reasons for this increase. First, the aggravated economic condition of NK in the 1990s, the shortage of food in particular, permitted its people to cross the borderlines with China and Russia and look for food overseas. And then too, the sudden death of the NK leader and founder Kim Il-sung created the national mood of confusion and hopelessness. There was a cautious talk of 'NK regime collapse' being quickly shared among the concerned people, especially the commentators for North Korean politics inside and outside the country. Thus SK government felt the need to prepare for a situation in which a sudden flooding of NK happened just as what happened to Germany with the sudden collapse of Berlin Wall in 1990.

Under the circumstances the 1993 'Law on Protection of Defected Compatriots from North Korea' was eventually revised to become the 'Law on the Protection of and Resettlement Support to the North Korean Defectors' and was put to use in 1998. Practically speaking, this law was an extended version of the 1993 law. According to spirit of the 1998

Law, the Agency for Unification under the Ministry of Unification took over the over-all management of all matters relating to NK defectors, setting up a government-initiated social adaption programs for them. The adaptation program was to render helping hands to the NK defectors to choose where to settle in SK and to settle into the local community in their chosen region as healthy members of the democratic society of South Korea.

For this purpose, in the legal spirit of the new law, the then existing assistance system for the defectors had to be reorganized in its entirety. And in turn ‘The Conference Group for Devising Counter Plans Regarding North Korean Defectors’ was set up under the directorship of Vice Minister of the Unification Ministry. At the same time, it strengthened the humanitarian principle, making the government’s economic and social assistance equally available to all the NK defectors whoever they are and for whatever reason they had chosen defection to SK (Do 1998; Sohn 2009, 184).

Article 1 of the 1998 law clearly stated that the purpose of the law is to “provide protection and assistance to the NK defectors who are required to rapidly adapt to and settle in all spheres of the political, economic, social, cultural life of South Korea.” What is striking about the 1998 law was that it for the first time introduced the sociological concept of social adaptation⁹ in precise legal terms and allowed the government-run support system to implement it accordingly. In line with such a rationale, the Ministry of Unification explicitly stated its vision and goal in the following way: “The government must seek to lend substantial assistance in conjunction with the tasks of social resettling supported by various security measures, economic independence and self-reliance, and national identity forming of the North Korean defectors in order for them to become healthy or adequate citizens of a democratic body politic and major actors for the nation’s possible reunification in the future.”

2. Resettlement support system at work

In July 1999, a government-run resettlement training center called ‘Hanawon’¹⁰ was open to offer the NK defectors, providing the overall interrogation procedure for them by a combined team of National Information Agency, Police Bureau and other concerned security bodies is over, a provisional shelter, security, and the basic short-term social adjustment training essential to their resettlement in the SK society. The training program was originally designed to be one year course within the enclosed precinct of Hanawon but its duration had to be reduced to 3 months and again to 2 months as the NK defectors surged into the country immediately after its launch (see Table 1). Consequently it had to open a branch office in Yangju near the main office in Anseong to house another 250 people in addition to the 750 people, the maximum limit of the Hanawon. The number of the defectors who passed through the Hanawon courses between July 1999 and December 2011 was accumulated to 21,000 (2012 *Practical Handbook of Resettlement Assistance to NK Defectors*, 15). Yet with the

⁹ According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, ‘adaptation’ is basically a biological term and defined as “a change or the process of change by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment.”

¹⁰ Hanawon’s official name is ‘The Office for Resettlement Assistance to NK Defectors’ and is commonly called Hanawon. The Korean word ‘hana’ means one and ‘Hanawon’ the ‘Institute for Oneness.’ Thus it implies that NK defectors and the citizens in SK are one people (and it by extension bears a hidden hope that ROK and DPRK will be one nation-state in the future). In a similar vein, those names such as ‘Hana School,’ ‘Hana Center’ are all that have something to do with NK defectors.

continuous influx of NK defectors these two offices soon ran out of accommodating spaces and eventually the 2nd Hanawon was open in 2012 with the housing capacity for 500 people at a time (2012 *White Book*, 197).

Also, its temporarily shortened training period of 8 weeks or 2 months was extended back to 12 weeks or 3 months again. The courses are divided into four parts as follows; stabilizing emotional and health conditions, enhancing the understanding about South Korean society or narrowing down the cultural gap, job consulting and training, and guiding the settlement policies and procedures etc. By 2011 this 4-course training program has been revised 11 times as the inmates' composition and needs were changed with women and children increasingly outnumbered. After the compulsory basic training courses defectors are then transferred to various regions of their own choice with a flat or house, resettlement money, and possibly with jobs depending on their individual aptitudes and preferences and of course in accordance with the given legal guidelines.

Upon their arrival at the designated regions, each of them is entitled to getting the three-fold protective care service to be given by 3 different protection officers who would respectively oversee and/or provide individual protection and consultation for the matters concerning residence, occupation as well as personal security. This three-fold protective care service has been in tact regardless of the repeated revisions in the government resettlement policies. In addition, the 'Association for Supporting North Korean Defectors' set up in 1997 and the 'Council of Civil Organizations for Supporting North Korean Defectors' set up in 1999 were to lend further assistances to resettlement of the defectors in various regions (Park 2002, 230). These two bodied will be reorganized and renamed later although their nature and basic functions will remain the same as before.

From 2010 the defectors are recommended to register with a regional social adaptation assistance center in their designated regions and to take another 3 weeks' practical training specific to their regional life requirements. This institution called 'Hanacenters' will stay in touch with them for the next 12 months after the 3 week-course is over, providing practical and firsthand information and direct communication services indispensable for solving daily problems confronted in the process of their regional adaptation. At present we have 30 Hanacenters in the nation, which are usually civilian organizations commissioned and financed by local governments and therefore are subject to their direct supervision. Regarding the workings of Hanacenters there appears to be a mixed evaluation. A study indicated that they were found to have contributed to NK defectors' regional adaptation (Kim 2009; Kim & Back 2010). On the contrary, they are criticized for having shown certain limits. For example, one study points out that their service programs were superficial and it is because the civilian bodies running the centers on behalf of the government(s) tend to see the training project as a kind of money-making opportunity and try to maximize profit at the expense of sloppy service (Kim 2010).

Like Hanacenters, a regional body called the Regional Consortium of Cooperative Networks is also in operation wherever 100 or more defectors are put together in a region. It is participated concurrently by the Hanacenter, religious organizations, civil organizations, major business representatives, protection officers, resettlement aiding bodies such as schools, medical centers, professional consultants and social welfare service providers, and chaired by a respected regional figure the regional government appointed. This Regional Consortium generally supervises and specifically helps the defectors in the region with getting works and other desired socio-economic supports as well as emotional consultations. It is also financed by the Ministry of Unification and therefore has a mandate to report its activities to its Minister once in every 3 months.

One of the newest governmental institutions is the 'Foundation for North Korean

Refugees' established in 2010 and manned by 58 people as of December 2011. Its chief mission is to lend individualized financial and advisory assistance to those who completed the regional training course and its subsequent observation period. The scope of assistance very extensive, ranging from paying for medical treatment, emotional care, job search, child rearing and schooling, further education to making loans. Not only that, it also offers other financial assistances such as supporting civil organizations initiated by and with NK defectors, projects and researches concerning their problems as well as well-beings, and self-employment through opening social workshops or entering farming business.

In cooperation with those support institutions, there are more than 100 professional consultants in SK's 16 cities and provinces and 1,549 volunteered helpers working for the defectors as of December 2011. From May 2011 the general call center (1577-6635) started providing specialized and individualized consulting services 24 hours. It has taken more than 8,000 cases just 8 months after its first call came in the center (*Practical Handbook of Resettlement Assistance to NK Defector 2012*, 202-210).

III. The German Road to Unification: A Brief Discussion

In retrospect, FRG at the outset of the split in 1949 and in the course of 1950s until the erection of Berlin Wall in 1961 was soaked in the regime competition with GDR. For that specific purpose it produced some specialized programs advertising the capitalist ideology and propaganda for the superiority of FRG's governmental and social system over the Eastern counterpart and in turn broadcast them with an aim to bewitch the minds of East Germans but then gradually shifted its direction to political education for both German peoples based on justifiable facts from the mid-60s.¹¹ Willy Brandt in 1969 dramatically announced the New Eastern Policy better known as 'Ostpolitik.'¹² It soon lead to the East-West Summit meeting, not just one but twice in the year of 1970 alone and subsequently to the 'Basic Treaty' between FRG and GDR two years later. Since the conclusion of the Basic Treaty FRG drastically beefed up the cooperative exchanges with GDR which became a UN signatory concurrently with FRG in 1973 and a year later they set up their permanent representative offices in Bonn and Berlin respectively.

Helmut Schmitt who succeeded Willy Brandt even further expanded this New Eastern Policy by concluding a series of agreements with GDR in the areas of Sports, Postal Services, coal and natural gas, etc. Chancellor Kohl of the opposition party also continued to strengthen the policy, laying out the autobahn between Hamburg and Berlin whereby the freedom of travel was further extended, expanding postal services and telephone services, and especially making official loans to GDR at lowest possible interest rates. On top of this, the 'Cultural Agreement' between two German states in May 1986 greatly facilitated mutual cooperation in the spheres of culture, art, education, science and sport. At last the then East German Secretary General Erich Honecker's official visit to FGR marked a vertex of the last two and a half decade-long rapprochement between the two German states (Park 2011, 89-92).

¹¹ It turned out that some 70% of the former East Germans listened and watched the western radios and televisions (Park 2011, 92).

¹² It came after giving up the Hallstein Doctrine which banned any diplomatic relationships with the East European bloc except the Soviet Union and making peace with the bloc including Poland and some Warsaw countries. It is no secret that this Ostpolitik of Willy Brandt inspired both Noh Tae-woo government's 'Nordpolitik' in the 1980s and later Kim Dae-jung government's Sunshine Policy in the late 1990s.

The number of East Germans who defected to West Germany between the erection of Berlin Wall on August 12, 1961 and the introduction of single monetary system on June 30, 1990 was about 4.6 millions and only 10% of them were immigrated by legal methods. Even during the complete cutoff period from 1961 to 1989 during which the Berlin Wall forbade free passage between GDR and FRG some 620,000 East Germans moved to the West. Thus the presence of GDR defectors has always been numerous and visible in FRG as compared to that of NK defectors in South Korea, whose number is not more than 25,000 at present. Also the complete shutdown period of the two Koreas since the provisional end the Korean War in 1953 with the demilitarized zone being in the middle is twice longer than the German case.

As we know, FRG's integration policies regarding the Easterners within its territory have been based on two specific principles: one is maximizing the social adaptability of Easterners and the other is minimizing the Federal Government's direct economic compensation for the loss of their fundamental life means, their former possessions in GDR as well as their human dignity impaired by the GDR regime. Instead they simply put them on social security networks and welfare systems like everybody else in the society. In this respect, we can find that FRG's defector policy was primarily focused on adaptation or acculturation of the Easterners to its society and its people, that is, assimilation. It is because FRG found it most essential for two different life styles representing two different socioeconomic and ideological systems for about 30 years to become one common life style representing the united Germany.

To do this, the FRG government appears to have taken two important approaches. One is to give the Easterners the government-initiated formal education for democracy by utilizing the existing Federal Center for Political Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) on both the federal and state levels. This democracy learning process is viewed vital for the former East Germans to get familiarized with the West German society and its political system. In fact, the FRG people also had been in the process of learning about democracy and its *módus ope-rán-di* through the same institutional scheme ever since the formal division by the allied forces in 1949. As a result, they are now one of the most democracy loving peoples in the world, not just in Europe.

The other approach is to make financial backing available to various civilian organizations which wanted to provide the Easterners with firsthand cultural experiences through various civilian-initiated programs. For example, some Christian organizations such as Catholic based Caritas Vand, Ackermann-Gemeinde and Diakonisches Werk, labor organizations such as Workers Welfare Association and German Welfare Association for Equality, and others like Displaced Peoples League, European Organization for German Youth, Central Association for Mid-European Germans, Ex-political Refuge Support Foundation and the Association for Rehabilitating the Stalinists that are a few of those civil organizations to take advantage of government provisions for helping the Easterners to adapt to the West German society and to familiarize with the people in it.

What is noteworthy, however, is that the latter approach is based on the principle of reciprocity in the sense that both parties more or less equally take part in fulfilling the ultimate objective of reaching a deeper level of social integration, rather than one party being invariably assimilated into the other. Incidentally this policy aimed at social as well as psychological integration was long-sighted and also sensible because civil organizations could best avoid indoctrination by providing informal loci for both Easterners and Westerners to meet face to face, try to understand each other and naturally to nurture mutual friendships between them. It is long-sighted because any change in one's perception requires longer time and more effort than a change does in one's physical environment. And it is sensible because genuine integration cannot be generated without mutual narrowing down of the gap in both

parties' perception. Yet it can be further justified that the German unification in 1990 was a big surprise not so much to the world as to both German peoples themselves. The unification came as a big surprise not so much to the Westerners as to the Easterners. It means that the Westerners were actually forced to accept the sudden, uncanny situation or the Eastern intruders with whom they had seldom thought of living together.

All in all, the social adaptation policy of the unified German government was primarily led by civilian organizations with the monies the federal and local governments provided. Those organizations focused mainly on the following three areas of major concern such as housing, work and education. To repeat, there were little, if any, artificial or forced attempts to depoliticize the defectors' previous politico-economic values or substitute them for those of Western liberal democracy and capitalism but various objective education processes through which the Easterners could freely compare one another and choose for themselves. Apart from the existing Federal Center for Political Education which serves all German citizens at all levels from children to adults whoever in Germany, the former East Germans are exclusively taken care of by the citizen colleges called 'Volkshochschule' in the regions. The regional citizen colleges offer various cultural programs and especially ample free discussions with the residents of the town into which the defectors moved as newcomers (Park 2011, 94).

Literally speaking, this means that the former East Germans have been encouraged to grow a new communal identity in friendly local settings rather than being forced to become West Germans overnight. However, what prevents the East Germans from acquiring a communal identity in their new Western home turned out to be their previous collective culture in thinking and life styles they brought with them from the East Germany (Park 2011, 96). Unlike self-identity which is generally expressed in one's feeling of happiness or contentment, one's communal identity as an individual member of a society depends on his/her will and at the same time appropriate environment for cultivating it. Despite of their delicate differences, however, they are closely linked with one another to the extent that the latter, communal identity, profoundly affects one's feeling of happiness or contentment. In this connection, ample intermingling opportunity offered by civic initiative groups can be the best cure for it above all else. To be sure, it would take long before this cultural cure actually comes into effect, for changing one's mind is harder than changing one's furniture.

Hence the present Germany still agonizes about becoming one truly integrated nation-state even after 20 years have passed since its unification and it is commonly said that there are two species of Germans in the seemingly integrated country. As a result, the stigma of 'Ossis' remains a psychological burden to the former East Germans and the word 'Ostalgie' is often uttered by them. All these things, in a nutshell, give rise to a vital lesson for the South Koreans who in many ways appear to have followed suit and are still closely taking the footsteps of the former West Germany with a view to its illusive but not unthinkable reunification with the North Koreans in the future.

IV. Is a Korean Parallel Possible?

The split of the Korean peninsula into two states has been an unfortunate historical fact since 1948 when United State-backed ROK on August 15th and Moscow-backed DPRK on September 9th were founded in Seoul and Pyongyang separately. The Korean War broken out in 1950 and concluded by a truce on July 27, 1953 let the split even firmer and irreversible for there was practically no peaceful exchanges between the two Koreas for the next 20 years

until '7·4 Joint Communiqués between the North Korea and the South Korea' in 1972. It was a dramatic turning point in the inter-Korean relationship that would quickly evolve into a series of constructive dialogues. For instance, the North-South Red Cross Conference was held 4 times in a row, beginning with its first one in Pyongyang on August 30, 1972.

However, this sudden peace phase did not last long as the Cold War structure was basically kept intact in both sides, especially in the fact of the North Korea's recurrent violations on the mutual peace agreement. After a few years passed Chun Doo-whan government abruptly produced 'The Initiative for National Reconciliation and Democratic Unification' in 1982 together with an invitation to a summit meeting for the first time and had to repeat it through a presidential envoy to North Korea in 1985 because the first proposal was not met with a response. This second invitation also failed to get an answer, either.

In 1988 Chun's successor President Noh Tae-woo unilaterally announced the '7·7 Protocol' proposing the non-nuclear Korean Peninsula again paired with the agenda of 'One Korean Community through Unification.' At the same time he put forward to the 'Northern Policy' or differently 'Nordpolitik' being strictly modeled on Brandt's 'Ostpolitik' and made diplomatic relations with Hungary, the USSR and the People's Republic of China in due course. Under the circumstances, NK started to respond and from this moment another peace phase unfolded; a series of events such as the concurrent UN entry of the North and the South Korea in 1991, the official adoption of the Noh's proposal of the non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, and to the monumental signing of the 'Basic Agreement between South Korea and North Korea' which was enforced in February 1992, was followed. This 'Basic Agreement' was considered a giant step forward to a more peaceful Korean Peninsula which obviously was in line with the farewell mood to the Cold War years.

Then the sudden death of Kim In-sung, the founder of DPRK, on July 8, 1994 nullified the summit meeting with his counterpart President Kim Young-sam. His heir Kim Jong-il kept an extremely low profile for the next 3 years or so. And when he eventually came back to the supremacy of NK leadership, Kim Dae-jung the allegedly anti-dictatorship activist cum pro-North politician was elected to the presidential office in South Korea. Accordingly, Kim Dae-jung presented him with a full package of the 'Engagement Policy,' better known as the 'Sunshine Policy.' In no doubt, this policy has drawn much on the West German examples, Willy Brandt's and Helmut Schmitt's in the 1970s in particular.

Kim Dae-jung government's engagement policy was well responded by the northern counterpart and this made one think that a real peace could at last be made permanently on the Korean Peninsula and that reunification would be imminent especially after the historic June summit meeting between Kim Dae-Jung and Kim Jung-Il in 2000 which yielded the '6·15 North-South Joint Communiqué.' Under such promising circumstances economic cooperation and exchanges of dialogues, resources and people between the two Koreas drastically increased although South Korea had to pay for most of the expenses incurred by those conciliatory gestures of peacemaking or rapprochement.

The long held-up Red Cross Conference resumed on August 15, 2000 and other economic cooperation including Gaeseong Industrial Complex and Gungangsan mountain tour project were rapidly put in operation. In 2007, to the surprise of many inside and outside the Korean Peninsula, President Roh Mu-hyun went to Pyongyang for the summit meeting with Kim Jong-il again and announced the '2007 North-South Summit Agreement' better known as the '10·4 Joint Communiqué. It was basically a sequel to the 2000 Communiqué, reaffirming the cooperative spirit and contents of the previous summit agreement and further drawing out the 10-point cooperation guidelines to go with it.

Unfortunately, however, neither the '6·15 Communiqué' nor the '10·4 Communiqué' was kept in effect since the conservative Lee Myung-bak government came to power in 2008.

It is because North Korea went back to its notorious rogue stance causing a number of incidences such as the shooting a civilian woman on a tour to Gungansan to death in July 2008, the North-sent spy disguised as a NK defector found also in July 2008, the rocket launch of Gwangmyongsong II in April 2009 to be followed by the second nuclear test next month. In spite of all these facts, President Lee Myung-bak in his new year's address in 2010 proposed a new proposal called 'Non-nuclearization-opening-3000' meaning that the South Korea will support North Korea until it reaches the GNI level of 3000 US dollars per capita on the two specific conditions; firstly that NK abandons its nuclear plan and secondly that NK opens up its economy and society towards the outside world. In addition to the proposal Lee also suggested that communication channels between the North and the South stay open at all times and a liaison office be set up in Pyongyang and Seoul.

Unfortunately however, just two months later on March 26, 2010, the South Koreans were totally devastated by the tragic losses of 46 marines in the sinking patrol vessel PCC-772 called 'Chonanham' in the sea of Baekryongdo islet near the NK border. In a most resolute retaliation, the SK government called off all forms of economic transactions and material transfers including humanitarian aids to the North Korea. This '5·24 Measures' brought the North-South relations to a complete halt for there would be no further talks, visits or transactions unless the North regime admits their masterminding of the Chunanham incident and also makes sincere apologies for the civilian shooting of 2008. In a typical tit-for-tat move, however, the NK regime again bombed Yeonpyeongdo islet close to the former target Baekryongdo in October 2010 for which the South Korean soldiers claimed a victory against the Northern bombers. Such military clashes only left the Peninsula in an absolute state of frozenness and the sun that once brightly shone on it was nowhere to be found.

V. What Matters to the NK defectors in South Korea

1. Shortcomings to Economic Independence

As we have seen in Table 2 earlier, the main reason for defection is economic rather than political by nature. This constitutes a partial reason that the numbers of women and children have dramatically increased since 2000. For example, in 1998 female defectors were only 118 or 12 % of the total 947, but in 2012 their portion amounted to 69% or 17,038 out of the total 24,614 NK defectors in SK. It is simply because women and children are economically most vulnerable to dire living conditions and at the same time least difficult people to bypass the border security guards. Yet there is one specific reason that readily explains the increase in the number of children under 9.

As aforementioned most NK defectors did not come on the direct route to SK due to the Demilitarized Zone completely blocking their passage to the South and they inevitably had to make a detour in one or more countries before treading on the South Korean soil at the end of their journey. This troublesome itinerary passing through foreign counties lasts at least 1 year, usually 2~3 years and sometimes takes an infinitely longer time. During those times the women defectors might be more likely to fall victims of sex trafficking by accident, by being forced or by their own choosing for life (Kim 2010, 98-101). That tells us a reason why they usually come to South Korea with their foreign-born children without their fathers. Or, perhaps, they simply thought that they might have better chances with their children alone, leaving their fathers behind. It does not matter which of these explanations is truer to their reality, but the fact that as high as 43% of NK defectors come between 1998 and 2012 were under the age of 29 as shown in Table 4 below demands justification.

Table 4 <NK Defectors, 1998~July 2012, Classified by Age>

	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 or Over	Total
N.	988	2,793	6,541	7,359	3,898	1,209	1,091	23,879
%	4	12	27	31	16	5	5	100

Source: Ministry of Unification, Republic of Korea;

<http://www.unikorea.go.kr/CmsWeb/viewPage.req?idx=PG00000000365>

My point here is that NK defectors constitute the least competitive portion of the South Korean population. Firstly, the fact of women and children being the majority means that they are less likely to work for living and thus have to depend on someone or something other than themselves and their own possessions. Secondly, they are lacking labor competitiveness in terms of skill and knowledge even if they are more likely to belong to one of those economically active groups aged from 20 to 59 as shown in Table 4 above. One additional reason for this is that they are unlikely to have had college education before coming to SK as the Table 5 indicates. By contrast, some 80 percent or more of South Koreans go to colleges and universities at present.

Table 5 <NK Defectors, 1998~July 2012, Classified by Education>

	Pre-school	Kinder-garten	Elementary School	Mid/High School	College	University or More	Other (Unspecified)	Total
N.	643	216	1,556	16,773	2,198	1,689	803	23,879
%	3	1	6	70	9	8	3	100

Source: Ministry of Unification, Republic of Korea;

<http://www.unikorea.go.kr/CmsWeb/viewPage.req?idx=PG00000000365>

Moreover, thirdly, as Table 6 below shows, some 50% of the defectors did not have jobs in NK and 38% of them was physical workers in NK. This means that they desperately need to get really good occupational training in order to become self-supporting responsible citizens with independent means for living in the South Korean society. Yet the chances for other more sophisticated and well-paying jobs rather than similar physical work by getting retrained look very slim as their education levels are so low. It is especially so because the SK's education system puts enormous emphasis on English learning from the elementary school level and most of the reputed job openings usually requires a certain standard of English understanding and speaking ability. This more or less customary requirement of a good command of English language in getting jobs and even in communicating with their Southern friends surely creates for them yet another obstacle.

Table 6 <NK Defectors, 1998~July 2011, Classified by Occupations in NK>

	None	Physical worker	Manager	Professional	Art/Sport	Helper	Soldier/Other	Total
N	11,048	8,411	391	457	189	838	603	21,937

%	50	38	2	2	1	4	3	100
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Source: *Practical Handbook of Resettlement Assistance to North Korean Defectors 2012*, Ministry of Unification, Republic of Korea, p. 113.

As a natural result, they tend to work as temporary workers and become labors on a piecemeal basis. According to a study on the status of NK defectors' employment in 2007, only 38.5% of the total defectors were full-time employees whereas 61.5% were part-timers or day-to-day labors (Back 2007, 238). In sum, the defectors are far from being competitive or stabilized in terms of occupation and liable to impoverishment after the government's grace period of 5 years is over.

2. Perceptual Gap and Identity Crisis

According to the present 'Law on the Protection of and Resettlement Support to the North Korean Defectors,' the defectors are entitled to the same citizenship rights as those given to the indigenous people of South Korea. However in reality they do not enjoy the status in full for the reason that they show a certain perceptual gap between their own ideology, whatever it may be, and that of most South Korean people. To be sure, their former political ideology of communism (or perhaps the semi-feudal nepotism of the Kim's family) and its economic system which is a kind of socialist or state-controlled economic management is necessarily different from that of South Korea based on liberal democracy. Put differently, there exists undeniable heterogeneity between the defectors and the local people in many ways, even the same Korean language in common use has become strange to one another's usage because they self-evolved without one another's influence during the last 6 decades' non-communication.

This heterogeneity will in turn be likely to come to the fore as the numbers of the defectors grow inside the society (Kwon 2011, 130). At present, NK defectors constitute only 1 percent of the total 2 million migrants in South Korea. This number is too small to be an influential minority group now but then they are the most privileged minority group with the relative ease of communication at hand as well as full citizenship which no other ethnic groups such as the Vietnamese, the Mongols, the China born Koreans and whoever else can have or acquire in such unconditional way as they can. This unconditional privilege of granting full citizenship upon their pledge to become a South Korean may very well prove to be a knife with two edges as far as the nature of identity crisis of the defectors concerned. They tend to have unusually high expectation of other Koreans' attitudes toward them as well as government's treatment of them and easily get offended or frustrated by anything or anyone that gets in their way.

This unstable state of psychology then leads to forming identity crisis. For example, a study by Choi and Cho in 2007 found that some former NK defector-turned college students did not have positive national identity as South Koreans. Another study by Oh in 2011 conducted in-depth interviews of a few juvenile defectors who fled again to the UK and heard from them that the South Korean society had marginalized them (Kim and Choi 2011, 41).¹³

¹³ It is so-called 'the phenomenon of defecting South Korea' started from 2004 and reached its high in 2007 and estimated about 1,000 by 2012 (March 14, *The Kidokin News*). Some of those who left South Korea for the western countries (see the table of footnote 8 in this paper) are reported returned back to South Korea

Recently the worst thing among others occurred and that shocked the South Korean society, not to mention the remaining defectors within it. There were 4 cases of ‘re-defection’ to NK during the past 3 years. Two months ago a NK defector family of 4 members returned to the North Korea via China after 4 years living in a Southern city of SK and told at a foreign press conference that they had been deceived by the South Korean government and it had done them wrong during their stay in the South. In addition, some of them took their lives. According to a report 16 defectors committed suicide between 2008 and 2011, which amounted to 9.1% of those 175 defectors died during the same period (Kyeonggiilbo, 2012).

In fact, a recent study shows that a majority of the defectors seems to retain their former identity, North Korean, even if they are now living in the South and expects to go back to the North when the country is reunited (Shin 2010, 95). In the same study some 41% of the South Korean cohorts of 500 thought that the defectors as their compatriots and only 14.6% of them considered the defectors as North Koreans in striking contrast to the fact that 58.5% of 285 defectors considered themselves as North Koreans. As for the reason for people’s prejudice against the defectors, some 38.8% of the Southerners pointed out the aversion to the North Korean regime and 29% of them chose the low level of knowledge about South Korea whereas some 34.9% of the defectors responded with the answer that because they came from a poor country and next 28.6% pointed out the fact that they came from North Korea.

As for the reason for the defectors having difficulty to adapt to the South Korean society, some 59.4% of the Southerners pointed out the fact that the SK social system is too different from that of NK, whereas some 45.1% of the Northerners responded to it with the fact that they did not try hard enough. Lastly, as for the reason that SK government supports the defectors, some 47.2% and 21.4% of the Southerners thought that it does so because of compatriotism and then preparation for reunification respectively. By contrast, some 52.5% of the Northerners identified the reason to be SK government’s preparation for reunification and another 25.5% thought it does it for compatriotism’s sake.

From this comparative survey analysis, we can find that the South Koreans tend to approach the defectors and their problems with compatriotism even though they do not like the NK regime. In other words, they are ready to live and work with the defectors. In stark contrast to this Southerners’ attitude, a large number of the defectors questioned is still identifying themselves with North Korea, a poor country,¹⁴ and for that reason they seem to stay in certain psychological distance from the Southerners and their society. This psychological distance in turn affects the Southerners’ feeling of intimacy towards the Northerners.

This socio-psychological phenomenon is supported by Kwon’s study on the South Koreans attitude towards NK defectors. His study discovered that some 63.9% of his 1,200 SK cohorts did not feel closeness to the defectors while only 10.8% of them objected their

after having been faced with linguistic difficulties in particular.

¹⁴ Table 7 <Comparison of Economic Strength between ROK and DPRK in 2009>

Classification				ROK	DPRK	ROK/DPRK (Ratio)
GNI (1991)				8,372,000 mil. US\$	224,000 mil. US\$	37.4
GNI per capita (1991)				17,175 US\$	960 US\$	17.9
Net	Growth	Rate		0.2%	-0.9%	-
(1989)						
Trade Total (1990)				686,620 mil. US\$	3,410 mil. US\$	201.4

Source: Yeom & Ryu (2011), p. 186; I excerpted only the items in the above table.

entry into South Korea. And it turned out that the more educated and economically self-content they were, the less opposed the defectors coming into the country (Kwon 2011, 140).¹⁵

One last point to make here is related to Shin's data analysis. It revealed that the defectors tend to think that they were being used by the South Korean government who does not hide its outright political ambition for the reunited Korea. It is a very telling discovery because the present defector policy is primarily based on the assumption that the defectors will be indispensable collaborators once the mere possibility of reuniting the two Koreas comes into reality and therefore supporting them now is an investment to its future dream. If our understanding is correct this kind of premature calculus was neither a part of the German unification nor that of the German resettlement policies for the East German defectors before the time point of its unification. For it could not be a daydreaming projection for a closely watched former aggressor of the World Wars. It may indicate that the former FRG without an ambition for unification could better concentrate on making the GDR's defectors within its society respectable democratic citizens equal to its local people. In this respect one could raise an alarm that South Korea's preoccupation with reunification may create untold side-effects for the NK defectors' permanent resettlement in and social adaptation to the society.

Conclusion: What Is to Be Done Now?

In 2000, there were less than 1,000 North Korean defectors living in South Korea. The number has grown dramatically since then and they are about 25,000 at present. Considering the fact that the defectors could only cross the North Korea-Chinese borders not the North-South Korean borders, it would not have happened without the Sunshine Policy albeit the terrible food shortage and famine of the late 1990s in North Korea. Although the policy was basically designed to open up the semi-feudal Kim Jong-il regime it incurred a sudden influx of NK defectors to SK, who otherwise might have stayed put in China or elsewhere. Ironically enough, the sun brightly shone on them instead of the frozen Kim's kingdom. It accordingly proved that the rumor of its collapse spread worldwide right after Kim Il-sung's death was nothing but a premature and groundless conjecture.

When President Kim Dae-jung, the initiator of the Sunshine Policy, came to power in 1998 he had the then 'Law on Defected Compatriots' revised to the present 'Law on the Protection of and Resettlement Support to the North Korean Defectors' in case of a massive defection from North Korea where allegedly more than 2.5 million civilians had already died of severe famine in the past 4 years. As we have seen earlier, this new law adopted the concept of 'social adaptation' for the first time and stipulated the following 2 specific objectives: one is extending humanitarianism onto the much suffered NK defectors and the other is building up the basic muscles for the possible reunification in the process of integrating them successfully into the SK society.

In line with these objectives the government opened Hanawon, a rehabilitation facility providing the defectors with the initial short-term basic training for social adaptation upon their arrival. After this 2-month program they were transferred to their chosen regions with a

¹⁵ Kwon's nationwide one-to-one survey data were collected by the Institute for Peace and Unification Seoul National University from July 4 to July 20, 2007. The number of respondent was 1,200 ranging from 19 and 65.

permanent rental flat, reasonable sum of resettlement money and further assistance to their resettlement for the next 5 years during which personal and residential protection, consultation and social welfare services were provided by government-appointed regional authorities. Later this defector law of 1998 was revised several times with some minor institutional changes. In 2010 the localized Hanacenters were open to make practical regional adaptation training available to the newly arrived defectors in various regions and also the Regional Consortium of Cooperative Networks was reorganized from its precursor to further strengthen the regional adaptation processes. Also in 2010 the Foundation for North Korean Refugees was open to help the defectors set up factories, retail shops or obtain jobs or education. In 2011 a 24-hour call center started taking calls from the defectors in need of help, talk or information.

Apart from those programs directly run by the government or the Ministry of Unification, there have been a variety of civil organizations and local governments being incorporated into helping the defectors. For example, the presently running Hanacenters are entrusted to the established local NGOs and then they are to participate in the Regional Consortium. Not only that, the Foundation, the Unification Ministry, Seoul Metropolitan Government and other local governments also have their annual budget for civil projects to be proposed and managed by civil organizations working for the defectors. In 2005 more than 60 civil organizations, usually social welfare service providers with religious background, were found working for NK defectors, and other civil organizations such as the Korean Association for Lawyers and the Korean Association for Medical Practitioners are also making partial contribution to the cause (Kang 2005, 54-55).¹⁶

What is more, the defectors have started to get organized themselves so as to help themselves and lend support to their newcomers by setting up North Korean NGOs in South Korea. Among them included League for NK Intellectuals, Comrade Association for North Korean Defectors, Free North Korea Radio, Pyongyang Folk Art Group, Exiled North Korean Pen Club and so on. This particular move shows that they are rapidly becoming social forces although limited in voice and influence within the present SK society, but their potential for political influence cannot be underestimated. One recent incident in particular testifies to this possibility. At the last year's general election Mr. Cho Myung-chul, a well-resettled North Korean defector-turned economist, entered the National Assembly through getting himself on the Saenuri Party's proportional representation list. Politicization or getting into politics is one of the southern tricks they have fast learned from the democracy worshipers in South Korea.

What worries us though is that the insulation process of NK defectors which has already begun without us giving it a serious thought. As we observed from the German case, democracy in a body politic is not substantiated without its members coming to terms with its fundamentals, that is citizen rights and responsibilities and their interconnectedness. To our disappointment, the present South Korea's defector policies largely bypass this point and only focus on getting the defectors practical skills to run their daily lives. Hanawon and Hanacenters run only short-term training courses, 12 weeks and 3 weeks respectively, and after these courses the defectors are free to confront the completely new world very different from their old one all by themselves. Children go to school but adults just go home to be self-taught. And the regional assistant networks only come to their rescue when they tell them

¹⁶ There must be a lot more civil organizations working for the North Korean defectors now because the public concern for this issue has drastically risen especially after the additional 2008 famine news from North Korea, but I am simply unable to find the available data to present here.

they are in trouble. The Foundation and the call center also perform the same or similar function. The government-funded public projects are mostly one-time businesses as they are carried out within the annual budget each year. As such, there is no long-term social adaptation or acculturation processes for the adult defectors except those their fellow NK defectors organized and therefore separated them from the rest of the SK society.

To remedy the shortcomings of the present NK defector policies, I suggest firstly that there are two institutional functions we must not miss out on the German social adaptation process even if that process has not been free from criticism. One is the function of Federal Center for Political Education and the other is that of Volkshochschule. The former will certainly help constitute the backbones of the former Easterners who seldom had chance to be accustomed to the workings of democracy. And the latter citizen colleges help both former Easterners and local Westerners to grow intimacy toward one another through repeated informal dialogues. These two institutions of course work differently but complement one another to the extent that they are the places where one can turn to find clues to and build up his/her national and communal identity. Without such places social integration is hard to be reckoned with because there is no common denominator to be found for collaboration for the common task.

My second suggestion is that SK government should think of the NK defectors not as compatriots or collaborators in the cause of reunification but as members of a minority group who deserve due respect for any other minority groups in the society. And it appears that the enormous privilege given to the defectors in the name of compensation for their 'ideological' defection turns out to be untrue as many of them still retained their national identity as North Korean and hoped to go back 'home' whenever possible. What is truer to their nature is the term 'internally displaced persons' created by contingent economic troubles. In this sense, political calculation of any sort by SK government will only sharpen their desire to maximize economic gains and draw a line between the defectors and the rest of society more visible. Indeed, social integration will never be possible in that way.

Lastly, in a more utopian way of thinking, the establishment of a NK defector village may be a radical alternative to put an end to their drifting life styles. This sounds a little strange but a rationalized suggestion in the sense that the NK defectors are not ready to compete with the Southerners in any aspect so that they need to be protected and at the same time deserve equal respect from the rest of the people like everybody else in the society. In such a village protected and supported by the government the defectors may start to write their new authentic life stories as real persons with their souls untouched by inferiority. Should there be such a village, the name 'Hana Village' suits it best.

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